







# STUDIES

IN  
THE SPIRITUALITY OF JESUITS

Christian Mindfulness

*A Path to Finding God in All Things*

WILLIAM REHG, S.J.

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## THE SEMINAR ON JESUIT SPIRITUALITY

The Seminar is composed of a number of Jesuits appointed from their provinces in the United States.

It concerns itself with topics pertaining to the spiritual doctrine and practice of Jesuits, especially United States Jesuits, and communicates the results to the members of the provinces through its publication, *STUDIES IN THE SPIRITUALITY OF JESUITS*. This is done in the spirit of Vatican II's recommendation that religious institutes recapture the original inspiration of their founders and adapt it to the circumstances of modern times. The Seminar welcomes reactions or comments in regard to the material that it publishes.

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CHRISTIAN MINDFULNESS

*A Path to Finding God in All Things*

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*William Rehg, S.J.*

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STUDIES IN THE SPIRITUALITY OF JESUITS

34/3 · MAY 2002

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## Of all things . . .

This May 2002 issue of STUDIES is my last as its editor, and soon I will chair my last meeting of the Seminar on Jesuit Spirituality. About that I will say more later. However, I will continue to direct the Institute of Jesuit Sources, where, I hope, we will not give reason for the remark of the fourth general of the Society, Fr. Everard Mercurian, “Nothing gives the Society so much trouble as the publishing of books.” I will also continue to serve for several years, so it seems, as rector of the Jesuit Community at Saint Louis University.



One always learns something new and often unexpected! Did you know that Edmund Campion, the English Jesuit martyr, wrote an epic poem? He is the author of an 821-line Virgilian hexameter work on the birth of the Church and on the transitory glory of the Roman Empire versus the eternal glory of the Church of Rome (*Sancta salutiferi nascentia semina verbi*). The *Times Literary Supplement* from March 8, 2002, carried an article, “Eternal Glory: Edmund Campion’s Virgilian Epic,” by Gerard Kilroy. Apparently there is only one extant copy of the poem. If you should want to consult it, it is in the British Library under the rubric “Additional MS. 36529.” Not even Carlos Sommervogel, S.J., the historian and editor of the great bibliography of all Jesuit publications from the beginning of the Society up to 1890, when his multivolume work appeared, records the existence of this epic in his ten-column list of all the works of Campion then known. Historians and others owe a great debt to Sommervogel, the centenary of whose death occurs this month. Literally thousands of Jesuit writings would have been unknown had it not been for his decades-long labors.

Facts about thousands of Jesuits (more than five thousand) and much, much more that is new and important can now be found in one of the most valuable works that the Society of Jesus has ever produced in its more than 450 years of existence. This is the newly published four-volume, more than four-thousand-page historical dictionary of the Society, *Diccionario Histórico de la Compañía de Jesús: Biográfico-Themático*. This extraordinarily interesting and useful work presents, in addition to biographies, such delights as histories of the Society in all the countries in which it has worked, treatments of themes such as atheism, law, missiology, economics, spirituality, and Vatican II—all reflecting a Jesuit context. These are serious, carefully researched, and clearly written essays. If he could have perused this dictionary, perhaps even John Adams would not have judged the Jesuits as he did in a famous letter of May 6, 1816, to Thomas Jefferson: “If any congregation of men could merit eternal perdition on earth and in hell, it is the company of Loyola.” This first edition, in Spanish, is published jointly by the Jesuit Historical Institute in Rome and the Universidad Pontificia Comillas in Madrid. The entire Society owes a great debt of gratitude to the American Jesuit Fr. Charles E. O’Neill, former director of the Jesuit Historical Institute, who conceived of the dictionary and began to

organize it, and to the Spanish Jesuit Fr. Joaquín Domínguez, who carried it to completion. The Institute of Jesuit Sources hopes to publish a later edition in English some years from now.

The recent *News and Features: The Society in Numbers*, from the Jesuit information office in Rome, can give rise to a good many questions and reflections, far too many to deal with here. But regarding the U.S. Assistancy, with its present 3,462 members, one might well ask, "Why do we still have ten provinces?" And one might well reflect on the implications of the following circumstances: If we continue to put off serious work on reducing the number of provinces, we may continue to be able to find ten good and able provincials, but where will we continue to be able to find ten good and able socii, ten province treasurers, ten formation assistants, forty province consultors, not to mention members of "province commissions" (eleven in one of the current U.S. provinces) and "province officials" (nineteen in another province)? The argument, a good one, is sometimes advanced that to consolidate provinces would consume so much energy better devoted to apostolic works. But how much energy is unavailable for such works because of the legitimate but reduplicative needs of ten province administrations? Just asking!

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Since its founding in 1969 the Seminar on Jesuit Spirituality has produced 163 issues of *STUDIES*. Father George Ganss, the founding chairman and editor, to whom as Jesuits we owe so much, was responsible for eighty of those issues. With this, my last issue, I will have sat in the editor's chair for eighty-three more of them. What the periodical is all about and why it is published I won't repeat here; all you need do is look at the inside front cover to see the purposes for which the Seminar and *STUDIES* exist.

In the course of its thirty-four years, 103 Jesuits from the U.S. provinces have been members of the Seminar. They especially, but also other Jesuits and laymen and laywomen, and in one instance a woman religious, have written on an extraordinary variety of subjects. The first two issues in 1969 bore the titles "A Profile of the Contemporary Jesuit: His Challenges and Opportunities" and "Authentic Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius: A Brief History of Their Practice and Terminology." If you have issues of *STUDIES* going that far back, you'll find that profile still relevant and the history of practice and terminology still illuminating. From there on, the subjects ranged from discernment to poverty, from spiritual direction to general congregations, from leadership and authority to authenticity and change, from the place of art in Jesuit life to prayer, from affectivity and sexuality to obedience, from Christology to alcoholism to reverence, from faith and justice to higher education, from formation to technology, from history and devotions to communication, from ecology to fund raising, from community to the Spiritual Exercises, from the liturgy to leisure, from Jesuits in jail to parish ministry, from history to poetry, from physics to Scripture, from imagination to counseling, from the Trinity to multiculturalism. And you can add here other topics dealt with that are among your favorites. If you consult the list of issues still in print at the end of each issue of *STUDIES*, you will see how varied all these subjects have been. These are



examples of Ignatius's fundamental insight and experience of finding God in all things.

The members of the Seminar itself have all been Jesuits, but with what a variety of backgrounds. They ranged from theologian to physicist, ethicist to linguist, historian to psychiatrist, Scripture scholar to economist, philosopher to TV producer, fund raiser to playwright, educational administrator to historian of technology, publisher to canon lawyer, political scientist to spiritual director, with the practitioners of so many other arts and crafts in the interstices.

Whenever I telephoned a Jesuit and, in the name of the provincials, invited him to accept a three-year term on the Seminar, I experienced a regularly recurring response: "Who? Me? I'm not a spiritual director or writer. I don't regularly give retreats. My background isn't in Jesuit spirituality." My response was often: "Those are precisely the reasons for your being asked to be a member of the Seminar. Even if not directly, every Jesuit is really involved in Jesuit spirituality in the very living of the Jesuit life. And we would like to draw on your experiences, your insights, your contributions to what it means to live the Jesuit life in the United States today. You would not be continuing to live that Jesuit life unless at the deepest it was rooted and nourished by the spirituality of the Society of Jesus." Once a man became a member of the Seminar, he saw how greatly varied were the ways that the spirit of the Society, its inner life, expressed itself in the immensely variegated lives and works of his fellow members.

The Seminar bids farewell this May to its departing members: Fr. William Barry, S.J. (NEN), tertianship director at Campion Center, Weston, Mass., and author; and in September it welcomes two new members and a new chairman. The new members are Fr. Claudio Burgaleta, S.J. (NYK), professor of Theology at Fordham University, New York; and Fr. Thomas Rausch, S.J. (CFN), professor of Theology at Loyola Marymount University, Los Angeles.

The Seminar and *Studies* go now to the very capable hands and imaginative spirit of Fr. Richard Blake, S.J., the new chairman and editor. A member of the New York Province, he is currently professor of Fine Arts and director of the Film Studies Program at Boston College. He will edit *STUDIES* from Boston, while the Institute of Jesuit Sources here in St. Louis will continue to carry out its printing and distribution. He and the members of the Seminar, present and future, will continue to serve the Jesuits of the U.S. Assistancy and other readers of *STUDIES*, I am confident, in a spirit of fidelity well described in its first issue: "Fidelity is the source of all newness and freshness. Through it the past erupts like a spring into the present, and the present itself comes alive." From such a present they and you can look with confidence to the future and to whatever new ventures they might bring to the Seminar and to *STUDIES*.

For myself, there are few gifts of God that I can think of more precious than having had the privilege for sixteen years of editing *STUDIES* and of sharing with so many of my brethren the life of the Seminar. My thanks to them and to all of you, the readers of *STUDIES*.

*John W. Padberg, S.J.*  
*Editor*



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# CHRISTIAN MINDFULNESS

## *A Path to Finding God in All Things*

*Will not a tiny speck very close to our vision blot out the glory of the world, and leave only a margin by which we see the blot? I know of no speck so troublesome as self.*

—George Eliot, *Middlemarch*

### Introduction

In the summer of 1980 I had the opportunity to attend a rather lengthy workshop on spirituality given by Anthony de Mello, S.J., the widely known Jesuit from India who integrated Buddhist and Hindu prayer forms into Christian spirituality. De Mello opened the workshop with the bold—and rather disconcerting—proclamation: “There is no self!” With that began my first extended introduction to Eastern forms of spirituality, beautifully interwoven into a Christian framework with de Mello’s distinctively spellbinding charm. Ever since then, I have found the spiritual exer-

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I thank the members of the Seminar in the Spirituality of Jesuits for their helpful suggestions and comments. I am also indebted to Marci Rehg, Kevin Burke, S.J., John Privett, S.J., Pak Pyong-gwan, S.J., Donald Miranda, S.J., Christopher Frechette, S.J., and Barbara Rossi for feedback and ideas. Jeremiah Alberg, S.J., made helpful suggestions on mindfulness as conversion and intersubjective mindfulness. Finally, I thank David Hilditch, James A. Rehg, and William Barry, S.J., not only for their feedback but also for supplying me with helpful reading material.

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cises to which he introduced us, in particular the awareness exercises, a helpful form of prayer, at the very least a prelude to the more traditional Christian ways of praying.<sup>1</sup> One thought especially intrigued me at the time: the idea of translating the awareness forms of prayer into a more conscious everyday living. But the idea merely hung around in the back of my mind with nowhere to go; as I recall, de Mello did not introduce us to any systematic program for such a translation.<sup>2</sup>

The thought had all but disappeared when, more than a decade later, a friend recommended to me Thich Nhat Hanh's little book, *The Miracle of Mindfulness*.<sup>3</sup> The title alone suddenly revived that old thought in me. Nhat Hanh not only provides an accessible and detailed introduction to awareness exercises focused on breathing, he also shows how one can extend such awareness into one's daily living so as to live more mindfully; indeed, that is the whole point of the more formal exercises. However, by the time I actually got around to reading his book, I had begun to think of mindfulness more broadly, as a phenomenon that could be studied in a variety of contexts.<sup>4</sup> I soon discovered that the idea of mindfulness had been employed in other disciplines besides spirituality. The philosopher Gilbert Ryle attempted to define thinking itself in such terms, under the rubric of "heedfulness."<sup>5</sup> Social psychologists have also elaborated conceptions of mindfulness, including the idea of "collective mind."<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> I suspect that many readers have some acquaintance with de Mello's manual of exercises, *Sadhana: A Way to God* (St. Louis: Institute of Jesuit Sources, 1978).

<sup>2</sup> In a later, posthumously published work, de Mello develops a program of awareness more fully, albeit without the counterbalance of meditative disciplines: *Awareness: The Perils and Opportunities of Reality*, ed. J. Francis Stroud, S.J. (New York: Image-Doubleday, 1992).

<sup>3</sup> Thich Nhat Hanh, *The Miracle of Mindfulness: An Introduction to the Practice of Meditation*, trans. Mobi Ho (Boston: Beacon, 1987); for more elaboration on the extension into everyday life, see his *Peace Is Every Step: The Path of Mindfulness in Everyday Life*, ed. Arnold Kotler (New York: Bantam, 1991).

<sup>4</sup> I first tried out a broader conception of mindfulness (in areas of science and in the Spiritual Exercises) in "Religious Values and Science: Artificial Intelligence Technology," in *Religious Values at the Threshold of the Third Millennium*, ed. Francis A. Eigo (Villanova: Villanova University Press, 1999), 175-226.

<sup>5</sup> Gilbert Ryle, *Concept of Mind* (London: Hutchison's University Library, 1949), esp. chaps. 2 and 5.

<sup>6</sup> See Karl E. Weick and Karlene H. Roberts, "Collective Mind in Organizations: Heedful Interrelating on Flight Decks," *Administrative Science Quarterly* 38 (1993): 357-81; a more individual conception is elaborated by Ellen J. Langer in her "Minding Matters: The Consequences of Mindlessness-Mindfulness," in *Advances in Experimental Psychology*,

Emboldened by the potential breadth of mindfulness, in this essay I examine our familiar Catholic and Jesuit traditions as providing us with specifically Christian practices of mindfulness. As we shall see, a broad range of traditional Catholic prayer forms can be understood in relation to mindfulness. Once I have discussed some of these forms, I turn to Jesuit spirituality, in particular, the idea of contemplation in action or “finding God in all things.” I close by suggesting a more expansive understanding of mindfulness, one with implications for our apostolic engagement in the twenty-first century.

Before turning to Christian prayer traditions, however, I examine the Buddhist notion of mindfulness. Why start with Buddhism? Because mindfulness lies at the center of Buddhist spirituality, its practices can illuminate resources that are already present in our own traditions but have generally not been articulated in terms of mindfulness. Moreover, the Buddhist tradition gives us a sufficiently determinate starting point that helps us fix our ideas a bit; otherwise, a notion as flexible and vague as “mindfulness” tends to point in too many directions, so that one never arrives at a determinate, usable conception. Although I am not simply importing Buddhist practices into Christian contexts, my reflections draw upon works that explore such possibilities for convergence or translation.<sup>7</sup> Many of the Christian initiatives in this direction have tended to focus on Zen Buddhism. The practice of mindfulness, however, goes back to older Buddhist traditions, among them the Theravada tradition; the key text is the *sutra*, or teaching of the Buddha, on the “four foundations of mindfulness.”<sup>8</sup> In his

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vol. 22, ed. Leonard Berkowitz (San Diego: Academic, 1989), 137–73; see also her *Mindfulness* (Reading, Mass.: Addison-Wesley, 1989).

<sup>7</sup> For an overview of authors, see Paul Bernadicou, “Catholic Guides in Dialogue with Buddhist Practice,” *Review for Religious* 58 (1999): 28–34. De Mello’s *Sadhana* is, to my knowledge, the most extensive Christian adaptation of Eastern forms of awareness exercises. More theological treatments of the relation between Christianity and Zen Buddhism can be found in Dom Aelred Graham, *Zen Catholicism: A Suggestion* (New York: Harcourt, Brace, and World, 1963); see chap. 2 for sage advice on how Christians should interpret Buddhist claims that there is no self. Thomas Merton gives a fairly cautious assessment of Buddhist-Christian convergences in his *Zen and the Birds of Appetite* (New York: New Directions, 1968); more sanguine is William Johnston, S.J., *The Mirror Mind: Spirituality and Transformation* (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1981) and *Christian Zen*, 3rd ed. (New York: Fordham University Press, 1997). Finally, Aloysius Pieris, S.J., provides a broad framework for Christian-Buddhist dialog in his *Love Meets Wisdom: A Christian Experience of Buddhism* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis, 1988). One can also consult the journal *Buddhist-Christian Studies* for work on dialog.

<sup>8</sup> See Venerable U Silananda, *The Four Foundations of Mindfulness* (Boston: Wisdom, 1990), for text and detailed commentary; Thich Nhat Hanh also provides a

very positive attempt to understand various Christian practices in terms of mindfulness, the Buddhist monk Thich Nhat Hanh draws on this literature.<sup>9</sup> In examining the Buddhist practice of mindfulness, I am most interested in treatments that focus precisely on mindfulness itself and the associated forms of meditation.

From the Buddhist notion of mindfulness, then, I draw out some broad features that promise to hold true of certain Christian practices in a way that does not simply assimilate these practices to Buddhism. In other words, I assume here that we can meaningfully describe certain Christian practices in terms of a Christian notion of mindfulness that is both distinctive yet sufficiently similar at a more generic level to the Buddhist notion. If this supposition proves good, then an interesting basis for further Christian-Buddhist dialog opens up. But identifying practices of mindfulness in Christianity can also deepen our appreciation of our own tradition: in particular, how it helps us pay more attention to our everyday present reality and God's action in that reality. In other words, the idea of Christian mindfulness can, I hope, lead us into a better comprehension of what it means to "find God in all things."

Even aside from questions of spiritual theology and interreligious dialog, the everyday practice of mindfulness has undoubted value today. At a personal level, I suspect that readers are all too aware of *mindlessness* and its effects in their own lives: rigid behavior patterns and knee-jerk reactions, the constant stream of thoughts and anxieties that can make us oblivious to our surroundings and to other people's needs. All these forms of mindlessness diminish our sensibility to life and its graces. At a societal level, mindfulness has become an urgent matter in a world in which all "our moments have been seized," as a columnist once put it<sup>10</sup> that is, by the continual bombardment of Muzak, Walkmans, and blaring videos, all drilling us in the consumer patterns dictated by the corporate culture in which we move and live and have our being today. That people these days feel the need to set aside periods of "quality time" speaks volumes about the compulsive character of daily life, the all-pervasive culture that invades more and more of our space,

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readable commentary with text. See his *Transformation and Healing: The Sutra on the Four Establishments of Mindfulness* (Berkeley: Parallax, 1990). For an account of the five main Buddhist schools, see Oscar Shaftel, *An Understanding of the Buddha* (New York: Schocken, 1974), chaps. 5-7.

<sup>9</sup> See his *Living Buddha/Living Christ* (New York: Riverhead-Putnam, 1995).

<sup>10</sup> Richard Ford, "Our Moments Have Been Seized," *New York Times*, December 27, 1998, sec. 4, p. 9; also see Thomas de Zengotita, "The Numbing of the American Mind: Culture as Anesthetic," *Harpers* (April 2002): 33-40.



indeed, our very minds and bodies. Could an everyday habit of mindfulness actually lead to an ongoing “quality” time for us?

## Buddhist Mindfulness

Buddhism comprises a number of different schools or traditions that differ, sometimes significantly, in their understanding of meditation, enlightenment, and the path to enlightenment.<sup>11</sup> Here I am interested in the idea and practice of mindfulness connected with *vipassana* meditation, or “insight meditation.” The various forms of *vipassana* meditation are elaborated at great length in the *Four Foundations* text mentioned in the Introduction above. Buddhist authors distinguish *vipassana* meditation from *samatha* meditation, which aims at a state of tranquility through concentration on some simple object, such as one’s breath or a mantra, to the exclusion of everything else. In fact, the two types are not absolutely opposed but differ in degree, specifically, in how much they emphasize the concentration and how they employ it. Thus *vipassana* meditation also involves concentration on some object such as one’s breathing, but differs from tranquility meditation by adding a more inclusive, less effortful element of mindfulness.<sup>12</sup> As U Silananda puts it, “you keep your awareness on the breath and also everything that comes to you through the six sense doors at the present moment. . . . You keep your awareness on everything that is present.”<sup>13</sup> Thus, as one attends to the primary object of contemplation, one also remains aware of other passing sensations, thoughts, feelings, and the like as they take place. One simply notices them without judgment or evaluation. But one always

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<sup>11</sup> For a representative selection of classic and contemporary texts, see Rod Bucknell and Chris Kang, eds., *The Meditative Way: Readings in the Theory and Practice of Buddhist Meditation* (Surrey, Engl.: Curzon, 1977); see also Shaftel, *Understanding of the Buddha*. Note that spellings of the Buddhist terms differ somewhat, depending on whether the author uses the Pali or Sanskrit transliteration. (I use the former.)

<sup>12</sup> One can distinguish two levels of attention or awareness here: the primary awareness of the object on which one concentrates, and the secondary level of mindful awareness of shifts in the primary focus. See John W. Newman, *Disciplines of Attention: Buddhist Insight Meditation, the Ignatian Spiritual Exercises, and Classical Psychoanalysis* (New York: Peter Lang, 1996), 28 f. According to Newman, in mindfulness meditation one aims “to be aware now of what I am aware of now as happening now. My second level of attention is always to be focused on the here and now, regardless of shifts in my first level of attention” (*ibid.*, 29).

<sup>13</sup> *Four Foundations*, 38. For a readable explanation of insight meditation, see Larry Rosenberg, with David Guy, *Breath by Breath: The Liberating Practice of Insight Meditation* (Boston: Shambhala, 1999); also Venerable Henepola Gunaratana, *Mindfulness in Plain English* (Boston: Wisdom, 1993). I also draw here on de Mello’s *Sadhana*.

returns to the main object of attention, in which one strives to notice ever more subtle sensations; for example, variations in each breath, whether the incoming and outgoing air is cold or warm, and so on.

Beginning with the mindfulness of breathing, the *Four Foundations* lays out a panoply of meditative exercises. These include the awareness of bodily postures and sensations, feeling states, and modes of consciousness (for example, restless and scattered, concentrated, sleepy). But one also finds exercises that employ the imagination, such as the meditation on the stages of corruption in a corpse.<sup>14</sup> Particularly interesting is the meditation on the repulsiveness of the body, which presupposes a months-long preparatory training in which one learns by heart a specified list of bodily parts and

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*As such comprehension matures, it leads to an insight that radically transforms one's entire experience.*

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secretions and, in addition, acquires certain attentive skills, including the ability to go beyond the mere names and focus on the particular repulsiveness associated with each part. In the advanced form of this practice, one dwells on one body part (to the point of absorption) until one gains an insight that frees one from attachment to the body.<sup>15</sup> Still other exercises focus on the *dhammas*, a term that is often translated as “mental objects,” though it includes material objects as well.<sup>16</sup>

In this wide-ranging practice, one might focus, for example, on the passage of thoughts, or various “hindrances” in oneself, such as ill will, attachments, and the like. In one such exercise, the meditation on the “five aggregates,” one attends to some object, such as a feeling, but goes beyond the simple perception of the feeling—that “this is a pleasant feeling,” say—to perceive the cause of its arising and disappearing.<sup>17</sup> As Nhat Hanh describes this exercise, one strives to perceive the interdependence of the object with everything else, an idea that other Buddhist authors describe as the “selflessness” or insubstantiality of all reality.<sup>18</sup>

I have described some of these exercises in more detail in order to bring out a further distinguishing feature of *vipassana* meditation, its orienta-

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<sup>14</sup> At the time the teaching was first delivered, one did not need to imagine this, but simply went to a cemetery and observed actual corpses.

<sup>15</sup> Silananda, *Four Foundations*, 64–72. Here insight meditation incorporates *samatha* meditation as a training stage.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, 95 f.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, 116 f.

<sup>18</sup> Nhat Hanh, *Miracle of Mindfulness*, chap. 5.

tion toward achieving a particular kind of insight into reality, which in turn is based on a “clear comprehension” of the phenomena that constitute the object of the meditation.<sup>19</sup> Such comprehension is not simply a matter of a proposition one comes to affirm, but is a full experience of the phenomena, a kind of seeing: “When you apply clear comprehension, it means you observe or take note of the object, paying close attention to it, trying to see it thoroughly, precisely, and with all the mental faculties in balance.”<sup>20</sup> Moreover, this kind of comprehension is eminently practical, something one carries out in all one’s activities; by it one sees which actions are both beneficial in general and appropriate in the particular circumstances.

As such comprehension matures, it leads to an insight that radically transforms one’s entire experience.<sup>21</sup> One comes to experience the impermanence, unsatisfactoriness, and insubstantiality of all things, including oneself.<sup>22</sup> As one can see from the exercises described above, this goal is built into the design of the various forms of *vipassana* meditation from the start. If a core Buddhist “theology” appears anywhere, it appears in the way these meditations are structured and the terse instructions that direct one’s attention in particular ways (for example, to the arising and passing away of sensations, feelings, and thoughts, or to the foulness of the body), so that one eventually comes to see everything as simply an ongoing process of interdependent elements without anything substantial behind it. If this theology sounds pessimistic and dispiriting, remember that it is only a formulation of an experience that Buddhist authors describe as an extremely exhilarating liberation from attachments and fears. The words do not so much embody a theological system as simply name this experience. Moreover, as a claim about the present order, it fits well with traditional Christian views, including the Ignatian idea of indifference. Christians can agree that everything in this world is not only impermanent and insubstantial, but also affords us no final happiness, and thus is “unsatisfactory.” They can even agree that the “self” we construct as a separate entity, with its projects

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<sup>19</sup> Silananda, *Four Foundations*, 50–64.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, 52.

<sup>21</sup> “The purpose of *vipassana* meditation is nothing less than the radical and permanent transformation of your entire sensory and cognitive experience” (Gunaratana, *Mindfulness in Plain English*, 171).

<sup>22</sup> For a vivid first-person account of this experience of no-self, see Roger Walsh, “Initial Meditative Experiences,” in *Meditative Way*, chap. 27.

and inclinations, fears, and so on, is not the true self destined for union with God.<sup>23</sup>

Nhat Hanh's formulation of this insight is particularly helpful for seeing its positive character. He speaks of "interdependence" rather than insubstantiality, and instead of "unsatisfactoriness" he uses the term "compassion."<sup>24</sup> I take the second shift to indicate how the insight into worldly cravings and attachments as the source of all suffering leads to a deep compassion for all creatures. Contemporary Buddhist authors as well as Christian commentators stress that Buddhist meditation is oriented toward this particular fruit. As Buddhists have shown by their deeds, compassion based on mindfulness allows one to meet hatred with love, and to work tirelessly for a better world.<sup>25</sup>

I close this examination of Buddhist mindfulness by pulling out the following general points as the most important indicators of how we might conceive Christian mindfulness. For the first two such indicators, the analogous Christian features are not hard to see. The third feature, by contrast, raises a further question.

First, Buddhist *vipassana* meditation depends on a faith in the particular hermeneutical grid that is built into the various exercises, a faith that such practices can bring one to an experiential, liberating insight into one's deep union or interdependence with all of reality. As William Johnston, S.J., puts it, Buddhist meditation "is based on a very great faith—faith in the presence of the Buddha nature [that is, one's basic interdependence] in the deepest recesses of the personality."<sup>26</sup> This further distinguishes insight meditation from tranquility meditation, which can be practiced as a purely secular type of relaxation exercise. Similarly, Christian forms of meditation depend on a faith in God's reality and loving presence.

Second, *vipassana* forms of meditation embody a *particular discipline* that brings the Buddhist to experience his or her interdependence with an impermanent reality that calls for compassion. That is, the exercises are

<sup>23</sup> A number of Christian commentators have made a similar point; see, for example, Johnston, *Christian Zen*, chap. 3; *Mirror Mind*, chap. 2.

<sup>24</sup> Nhat Hanh, *Miracle of Mindfulness*, 45.

<sup>25</sup> "When we are mindful, touching deeply the present moment, we can see and listen deeply, and the fruits are always understanding, acceptance, love, and the desire to relieve suffering and bring joy" (Nhat Hanh, *Living Buddha*, 14). For concrete examples, see James Forest, "Nhat Hanh: Seeing with the Eyes of Compassion," in *Miracle of Mindfulness*, 101–8; also Chên Không, *Learning True Love: How I Learned and Practiced Social Change in Vietnam* (Berkeley: Parallax, 1993).

<sup>26</sup> Johnston, *Christian Zen*, 17.

structured in such a way that one who sticks with them comes to experience what was first taken on faith. Similarly, Christian forms of meditation are prestructured according to a Christian perspective, so as to bring the disciple to an experience of God's love and a conviction that "the deepest and truest thing within me is not myself but God."<sup>27</sup> And in both religious traditions, the experience of this ultimate reality should issue forth in works of charity and compassion.

Third, these more explicitly religious aspects of Buddhist mindfulness are, at the most mundane level, built on the simple practice of paying close attention to ordinary, everyday phenomena such as breathing or walking. As the Buddha put it when asked what was so distinctive about his monks' very ordinary practices, "When we sit, we *know* we are sitting. When we walk, we *know* we are walking. When we eat, we *know* we are eating."<sup>28</sup> Indeed, the formal meditation periods are, at the very least, intended to feed into and foster a continual mindfulness of the present moment and of what one is doing, thinking, and feeling in the present moment. As Nhat Hanh points out, one can bring oneself quickly back to the present simply by taking a few seconds to notice one's breathing. However, jumping to a Christian correlate of this third feature strikes me as premature. I think, rather, that the issue calls for further questioning.

## A Further Question

In the foregoing list of characteristics I did not identify the Christian analog of the third feature, everyday mindfulness. Christian correlates with the more advanced aims of Buddhist meditation—mindfulness ripened to deep insight into reality—came readily to mind; but it was not immediately clear to me what mundane Christian practices are the most suitable analogs for the Buddhist's simple acts of paying attention to the present. To be sure, a host of candidates present themselves for consideration, the myriad ways that Christians have developed of praying in the midst of daily activity. But some of these tend to be more concentrative than mindful, focusing one's attention on a sacred object or

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*Compassion based on mindfulness  
allows one to meet hatred with love,  
and to work tirelessly  
for a better world.*

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<sup>27</sup> Ibid., 18.

<sup>28</sup> Nhat Hanh, *Living Buddha*, 14.

pious thought at the expense of present activity. Such prayer forms are thus more akin to *samatha* meditation. In his 1980 workshop, de Mello described the constant repetition of the Jesus prayer along such concentrative lines; in fact, I think there are other, more mindful possibilities for such a prayer, which I will note later. At least in its typical vocal form, the rosary seems to be a kind of *samatha* prayer: the repeated Hail Marys help one block out distractions and concentrate on the mysteries. Other Christian prayers tend to be more discursive than mindful. And still others, such as the daily examen, tend to work indirectly to increase mindfulness: by noticing my behavior post hoc I gradually learn to catch myself in the act itself.

A Christian mindfulness, I believe, should have something akin to the simple direct attentiveness that characterizes the Buddhist practice. One may, of course, simply import the Buddhist practice as a kind of supplement to the Christian life. To the extent that I have attempted this, I am im-

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*Christians can approach the present moment in faith as the moment of creation, just as it concretely appears in each moment.*

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pressed by the distinctive spiritual fruits it brings. Mindfulness pulls me out of my head back into the present reality. One begins to notice how much of one's thoughts is driven by fears and concerns, worries about the future, or by attachments of various types, the need to rehearse favorite ideas, to build up one's ego, and so on. Likewise, the roots of behavior patterns in cravings and compulsions become clearer, making rationalization more difficult. At the same time, one's mind is

opened up, without thoughts, to the surprising but ever passing beauty of mundane objects, to a simple awareness of the present. In one's interactions with other people, mindfulness helps one listen unburdened with the need to make one's own point, or by concerns and desires that take one out of the present, away from one's interlocutor. Surely such attentiveness is crucial for the practice of Christian charity or, as Ignatius puts it, a "discerning charity."

What I am after, in short, is a distinctively Christian way of attending to the moment-by-moment reality. In saying this, I do not mean to accord this particular type of prayer superiority over the other types. Which form of prayer an individual favors no doubt depends on that person's psychology, life circumstances, and so on. The different ways of prayer are, after all, means toward union with God (which is God's gift in any case), and I suspect each can serve this ultimate end equally well.

In any case, to better sort through the various candidates for a Christian version of *vipassana* prayer, a brief, somewhat more theological reflection helps.

## The Creative Moment of Redemption

To get at a distinctively Christian method of mindfulness, it helps if we recall two ways in which the Christian faith-experience differs, at least on the surface, from the Buddhist experience of reality (as I understand it). First, the Buddhist idea of insubstantiality, the experience of phenomena as ongoing process without self, is modified for the Christian by the faith that each present moment is the ongoing creative act of a loving, personal God. Second, the experience of impermanence is qualified for the Christian by belief in the promise of resurrection. We believe that something deeper and lasting in creation, and in our own life histories and actions, will be revealed on the Last Day—just as the apparent failure of Jesus' life harbored a deeper meaning that was revealed

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*One's mind is opened up, without thoughts, to the surprising but ever passing beauty of mundane objects, to a simple awareness of the present.*

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after his resurrection and became the central narrative of victory for Christians throughout the ages. From the Christian perspective, then, the impermanence and insubstantiality of all things refer to the continual moving on of all creation toward the personal Omega point of Christ's Kingdom, and unsatisfactoriness refers to the incompleteness of all present things, an incompleteness that calls us to cooperate in the compassion of Christ toward a suffering world.

Like Buddhist mindfulness, then, Christian mindfulness has an affective, practical character that deserves emphasis here. For the Christian, the divinely personal character of the present moment means that such mindfulness involves a loving attention to the present reality. We might say that Christian mindfulness is above all a mindfulness of the heart, a mindfulness that attends to the love of God in creation and thus is lovingly responsive to that creation. Consequently, as one's mindfulness deepens, so also should one's charity.

The foregoing observations mean that Christians can approach the present moment in faith as the moment of creation, just as it concretely appears in each moment. And faith in the resurrection means that each moment harbors the invitation to cooperate, by my choices and actions, in

the process of redemption pushing toward resurrection, just as this process and its invitation concretely appears in each moment. Not that the mindful Christian continually has this particular *thought*. In the foregoing paragraph I simply attempted to describe two core aspects of Christian faith in more present-oriented terms. But if I *start* with the faith that each moment is the moment of creation just now appearing, then I do not need to think a particular theological thought; rather, I only have to be attentive to the creation before me. And if I start with the faith that everything before me is pushing toward a resurrection to which my own choices are intimately connected, then I don't have to think this thought each moment; I only have to attend carefully to the demands of each situation. In Ignatian terms, I simply practice a discerning charity appropriate to each situation.

In fact, the agreement between Buddhist and Christian traditions on this particular point is striking. Regarding the Buddhist practice of daily mindfulness, Thich Nhat Hanh notes: "Keep your attention focused on the work, be alert and ready to handle ably and intelligently any situation which may arise—this is mindfulness. There is no reason why mindfulness should be different from focusing all one's attention on one's work, to be alert and to be using one's best judgment."<sup>29</sup> Similar recommendations can be found in the Desert Fathers and Mothers of the fourth century.<sup>30</sup> Within the Jesuit tradition of finding God in all things, one finds a similar view. Drawing on Nadal, Joseph F. Conwell, S.J., argues that "contemplation in action does not mean that marvelous recollection in the midst of a crowd where one is so absorbed in God he is scarcely aware of the crowd; it means that marvelous recollection in the midst of a crowd where he is so absorbed in God *he is very much aware of the crowd*, seeing on each one the mark of the Blood of Christ."<sup>31</sup> Likewise Maurice Giuliani, S.J., who notes that when Ignatius refers to finding God in all things, he "does not ask the mind to distract itself from the present activity to become aware of God by a sort of division which would eventually become intolerable."<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>29</sup> *Miracle of Mindfulness*, 14.

<sup>30</sup> Thomas Keating, "The Practice of Attention/Intention," in *Centering Prayer in Daily Life and Ministry*, ed. G. Reininger (New York: Continuum, 1998), 16.

<sup>31</sup> Joseph F. Conwell, S.J., *Contemplation in Action: A Study in Ignatian Prayer* (Spokane: Gonzaga University, 1957), 84 (emphasis added).

<sup>32</sup> Maurice Giuliani, S.J., "Finding God in All Things," in *Finding God in All Things: Essays on Ignatian Spirituality*, trans. W. J. Young, S.J. (Chicago: Regnery, 1958), 16.



## Forms of Christian Prayer in Relation to Mindfulness

We are now in a position to take a stab at sorting through the different Christian prayer forms. From the standpoint of Christian mindfulness, we can distinguish at least three broad categories (which overlap in some cases). First, just as formal Buddhist meditative practices are supposed to feed into everyday awareness, fostering an ever deeper and more constant mindfulness, so also the more formal periods of prayer for the Christian foster the kind of faith that can approach the present as an ongoing creation and redemption. These periods of lengthier formal or meditative prayer (particularly those practiced during retreats) train us in the habits of the discerning charity that accords with Christ's compassion. In such prayers we open ourselves to the movements of the Spirit inside us, and learn how to heed God in all things. Such exercises are, then, *formal preparations for mindfulness*.

Any kind of formal prayer exercise—whether vocal, mental, or contemplative—that increases our faith in God's loving presence counts as a preparation for Christian mindfulness, simply because it strengthens the faith dispositions described above. But those formal prayer exercises that actually train one in specific ways of paying attention go beyond this general kind of preparation. As de Mello and others have pointed out, if we begin with specifically Christian faith dispositions, then we are free to adopt such Buddhist practices as breathing meditation, awareness of body sensations, and the like, which now become *Christian* forms of *vipassana* prayer. Precisely this initial Christian disposition is all one should need to transform Eastern practices into Christian ones. However, I said earlier I would try to do more than simply import Buddhist practices into Christianity. I thus suggest that if one desires a more explicitly Christian adaptation of Buddhist meditative forms, one need only link one's breathing with the name of Jesus or some other short Christian prayer. But faith remains the key in either case: according to Johnston, whether one breathes in silence or with a Christian word, one is "breathing in faith." In support of this idea, Johnston cites no less a source than St. John of the Cross.<sup>33</sup>

Before moving on, I mention one example of how a formal mindfulness prayer can carry over into everyday life. By practicing a mindfulness of the various distracting movements—stray thoughts and feelings, anxieties, and the like—that arise during meditation, one heightens one's sensitivity to such interior movements not only during formal prayer times but also in the midst of everyday activities and interactions. I more readily become aware of

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<sup>33</sup> John of the Cross holds that all our breathing points to the ultimate breath that is the Holy Spirit (*Mirror Mind*, 57f., also 50ff., esp. 53).

the various ways I'm pulled out of the present moment and away from listening to others. Paradoxically, this seemingly introspective awareness actually takes one back in the opposite direction—back into the present and its demands, back to one's interlocutors.

The second general category includes prayer forms such as the examen, or examination of consciousness, the sacrament of reconciliation, and the like. These we might call *prayers of retrospective mindfulness*: in them we recall our day and our actions to discern in retrospect God's presence and to explore how attentively we responded to the moments of the day. Such prayers train us indirectly in the habit of ongoing mindfulness. For example, by helping us to become retrospectively aware of our behavior patterns, feelings, and so on, the daily examination of consciousness develops our ongoing sensitivity to such phenomena as they develop in the moment itself.<sup>34</sup>

Finally, there are those prayer forms that Christians employ in the very midst of action, which we might describe as *prayers of engaged Christian mindfulness*. Prayers in this category bring one directly into the present situation as it is; they direct one's attention to the present moment and its demands. Again, the faith disposition is decisive here: insofar as one starts with this fundamental Christian disposition toward each moment as charged with God's redeeming presence, such engaged mindfulness need not employ specifically Christian thoughts. That granted, are there more explicitly Christian modes of engaged mindfulness? I think there are indeed; for example, in those very short subvocal prayers—as simple, say, as the word “thanks”—that connect the present moment with Christ or God. When St. Paul tells us to give thanks continually, he recommends a specifically Christian practice of engaged mindfulness. The Jesus Prayer is another example, about which more later.

I am inclined to see such prayer forms as examples of engaged Christian mindfulness because they closely parallel a Buddhist recommendation of Nhat Hanh. In any number of places, he recommends returning to one's breathing from time to time in the midst of activity, say every time one hears a bell or must wait for a traffic light to change. To help with this, he recommends little poems whose verses follow the rhythm of breathing, for example:

Breathing in, I calm my body.  
Breathing out, I smile.  
Dwelling in the present moment,

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<sup>34</sup> See George A. Aschenbrenner, “Consciousness Examen,” *Review for Religious* 31 (1972): 14–21.

I know this is a wonderful moment.<sup>35</sup>

This recommendation readily translates into explicitly Christian forms: I simply return to the rhythm of breathing by saying to myself an appropriate Christian verse, or by matching my breathing with the name of Jesus (for example, Jesus, I breathe in your peace . . .).

I do not claim that the three broad categories cover all forms of Christian prayer. Moreover, some prayer forms may serve in more than one capacity. For example, the examen is a formal exercise in retrospective mindfulness. The Eucharist—if I may venture some tentative suggestions—involves each of the three forms. It is, first, a formal exercise in Christian faith, a period of time set aside in which we feed our faith commitment in a way that strengthens us for a more directly engaged Christian mindfulness in the world. Second, in the Eucharist we practice retrospective mindfulness insofar as we remember the past in a way that makes our present living more mindful. When we “acknowledge our failures” and “call to mind our sins” in the penitential rites,

we engage, at least to some extent, in an act of recollection that might be construed as retrospective mindfulness. However, the Eucharistic activity of communal remembrance, which directly strengthens us for mindful engagement in the present,

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*There are those prayer forms that Christians employ in the very midst of action, which we might describe as prayers of engaged Christian mindfulness.*

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provides a much better example of retrospective mindfulness. That is, the structure of the Mass—the liturgy of the Word followed by the liturgy of the Eucharist—helps us see that the history of God’s saving activity, as recalled in the readings, now achieves reality in this present moment through the consecration. Consequently, we can also see the Eucharist as a mode of Christian mindfulness engaged with the present moment. This is how Nhat Hanh interprets it: “The Eucharistic rite encourages us to be fully aware so that we can touch the body of reality in us. Bread and wine are not just symbols. They contain the reality, just as we do.”<sup>36</sup> Coming from a Buddhist, this is an amazing affirmation of the Real Presence. Going beyond this statement, however, I would say that the Eucharist displays the third form of prayer insofar as it represents the supreme act of communal mind-

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<sup>35</sup> *Living Buddha*, 16.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, 30 f.

fulness in which we as a community become aware of the depth of God's action in the present reality.

Regarding the practice of engaged mindfulness, I should mention a tension, or tendency, in mindfulness prayers that rely on explicitly Christian words, as suggested above. If, for example, one is linking one's breathing with the name of Jesus, the possibility exists that one will slide into a *samatha*-style meditation that takes one away from mindfulness of the breathing. In fact, the formal Buddhist exercises also employ simple phrases as a support for mindfulness (for example, counting breaths, or matching one's breathing with "breathing in"/"breathing out"); according to Larry Rosenberg, the words can help "stabilize our attention."<sup>37</sup> But for Buddhists the words refer more directly, it seems, to the bodily activity as such. So if the name of Jesus is to serve in Christian mindfulness meditation, the words should neither become a focus for one's active imagination nor a mantra; that is, a mere sound whose constant repetition induces a state of absorption. The name is not in competition with one's attention to breathing. Perhaps we might say that with the name of Jesus one blesses each breath with all its sensate complexity: one calls it a sacred moment. From this perspective, a shorter saying seems more appropriate for extended mindfulness than the above verses used to recall one to mindfulness. The more words one uses, the more easily one can slide away from attention to the moment itself.

This last point raises an interesting question regarding mindfulness and the practice of "centering prayer" that has recently been revitalized among Catholics. This type of prayer provides us with further insight into the practice of Christian mindfulness. It also provides a good occasion to say something about the Jesus Prayer.

## Centering Prayer and Mindfulness

The suggestion that mindfulness meditation can consist of prayerfully repeating a sacred word, such as "Jesus," suggests the possibility that mindfulness may simply be a type of centering prayer (or vice versa). This term seems to come from Thomas Merton's talk of the encounter of God at the person's "center." The form of prayer itself, however, goes back at least to St. John Cassian and the author of the *Cloud of Unknowing*.<sup>38</sup> According

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<sup>37</sup> *Breath by Breath*, 25.

<sup>38</sup> On the historical background to centering prayer, see Gustave Reininger, "The Christian Contemplative Tradition and Centering Prayer," in *Centering Prayer in Daily Life and Ministry*, chap. 3; also M. Basil Pennington, *Daily We Touch Him: Practical Religious Experiences* (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1977), 41-44; see also Pennington's

to its principal proponents, in centering prayer one introduces a simple sacred word such as “love” or “Jesus” into one’s mind and then allows the word to repeat itself.<sup>39</sup> Such prayer forms involve an interesting mix of concentration and mindfulness, *samatha* and *vipassana* orientations, that differs in an instructive way from the Christian mindfulness prayers I’ve described above.

As M. Basil Pennington pointed out early on, centering prayer is superficially similar to the “transcendental meditation” proposed by the Maharishi Mahesh Yogi. Given the source of TM in the Hindu Vedic tradition of *samatha* meditation, one could get the impression that centering is a Christian analog of such meditation.<sup>40</sup> To be sure, in drawing the comparison Pennington stressed important differences. Unlike the Hindu meditation, centering presupposes a faith commitment and does not rely on a mantra: for the Christian, the meaning of the repeated word matters precisely because it expresses one’s *intention*, in faith, to consent to God’s presence and action in oneself.<sup>41</sup> But these differences are compatible with a Christian form of tranquility meditation. In fact, there are significant similarities between centering prayer and John Main’s interpretation of the Christian contemplative tradition, which does employ mantras. For Main, one should choose a mantra (for example, “maranatha”) without imaginative associations; this word then acts “like a harmonic that we sound in the depths of our spirit.”<sup>42</sup> The alignment of centering prayer with *samatha* meditation gains further support from the way in which proponents of centering talk about withdrawing from the concrete present and resting in God. This suggests an opposition between centering and outer experience.<sup>43</sup>

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“Centering Prayer: A Living Tradition,” in *The Diversity of Centering Prayer*, ed. G. Reininger (New York: Continuum, 1999), chap. 1.

<sup>39</sup> Pennington explained the basic steps to centering prayer in *Daily We Touch Him*, 44–54, and has further clarified them in his *Centered Living: The Way of Centering Prayer* (Ligouri, Mo.: Ligouri/Triumph, 1999), 42–52. Keating also provides a clear explanation of the practice in his “Practicing Centering Prayer,” in *Diversity of Centering Prayer*, chap. 2.

<sup>40</sup> *Daily We Touch Him*, chap. 4.

<sup>41</sup> Keating, “Practicing Centering Prayer,” 18; also Cynthia Bourgeault, “Centering Prayer as Radical Consent,” in *Diversity of Centering Prayer*, chap. 4.

<sup>42</sup> John Main, O.S.B., *Word into Silence* (New York: Paulist, 1981), 10f., 15. Like the centering movement, Main draws both on the *Cloud of Unknowing* and St. John Cassian; he does not connect the word with breathing. Finally, he clearly thinks that the Christian mantra is not meaningless, but rather expresses a Christian faith commitment.

<sup>43</sup> E.g., Pennington, *Centered Living*, 46, raises the possibility of bringing together centering and walking, but notes that this would involve a division in one’s

But centering prayer also involves elements associated with a *vipassana* orientation. Although centering prayer does not link the sacred word with one's breath or other bodily sensations, some authors emphasize the effortless receptivity of centering in contrast to the more effortful concentration and restricted awareness characteristic of *samatha*.<sup>44</sup> One does not fight distractions in an effortful manner: "We resist no thought, retain no thought, react emotionally to no thought, and return to the sacred word when we notice we are thinking some other thought."<sup>45</sup> Moreover, the importance of one's surrender to God—one's willingness while centering simply to rest in the intention to consent, allowing to surface whatever arises from the unconscious—brings centering closer to *vipassana*.

Like most forms of meditative prayer, then, centering combines *samatha* and *vipassana* orientations in its own distinctive way. The key difference, I think, lies in this, that mindfulness meditation anchors such receptivity in the body and other concrete elements of experience, whereas centering attempts to move beyond these.<sup>46</sup> Differences notwithstanding, a similar receptivity to upsurging thoughts—neither dwelling on them nor forcing them away—is found in both centering and mindfulness meditation. In the context of the Christian faith commitment, such receptivity can express, in both forms of prayer, the intention of surrender. This suggests a further possibility for how we might understand the status of the sacred word in Christian mindfulness exercises; namely, that the sacred word I connect with my breathing symbolizes the faith intention of remaining in the concretely, indeed bodily, present moment that is also God's presence.

In fact, the Jesus Prayer (of the *Philokalia* tradition), at least according to some interpretations, may come the closest to the Christian mindfulness I've been aiming at. Although we can readily understand this prayer form as a kind of tranquility meditation that turns our attention away from our present surroundings (apparently this was de Mello's interpretation),

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attention between the physical operations and God.

<sup>44</sup> Bourgeault, "Centering Prayer as Radical Consent," 41–46.

<sup>45</sup> Keating, "Practicing Centering Prayer," in *Diversity of Centering Prayer*, 20.

<sup>46</sup> Other differences are interesting: in centering one tries to make sure that bodily sensations do not distract one from the start, whereas in mindfulness meditation such distractions are accepted as likely. And in centering, one returns from a thought by gently reintroducing the sacred word; in mindfulness one stays with the distraction as long as it imposes itself. One may even use a word that supports attention to the distraction (e.g., one may repeat "itching, itching, itching" as long as such a sensation is distracting one). This latter practice does not signify an attachment to the distraction, but rather a receptive noticing of its coming and going.

some commentators construe it in terms consistent with *vipassana* meditation. William Johnston, S.J., has noted the similarity between the *Philokalia* tradition and Buddhist breathing meditation. As a formal exercise, in other words, the Jesus Prayer is quite similar to the mindfulness meditation I described above:

So, sitting down in your cell, collect your mind, lead it into the path of the breath along which the air enters in, constrain it to enter the heart altogether with the inhaled air, and keep it there. Keep it there, but do not leave it silent and idle; instead give it the following prayer: "Lord Jesus, Son of God, have mercy on me." Let this be your constant occupation, never to be abandoned.<sup>47</sup>

Here the connection of the Jesus Prayer with breathing keeps one in the present moment, inasmuch as it connects the prayer with awareness of one's body.

## Mindfulness and Ignatian Prayer: The Rules for Discernment

I now want to broaden my exploration of Christian mindfulness, noting some ways that our tradition encourages attention to God's action. I turn first to the *Spiritual Exercises* of St. Ignatius. As John W. Newman points out, a number of the general directives in the *Exercises* already incorporate an element of mindfulness. Specifically, the requirement in the seventeenth annotation that the retreatant report "various agitations and thoughts" to the retreat director, the review sessions and repetitions, and the examens undertaken during the retreat "together produce a cumulative watchfulness of what passes in mind and heart."<sup>48</sup> But the Rules for Discernment provide the

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*The sacred word I connect with my breathing symbolizes the faith intention of remaining in the concretely, indeed bodily, present moment that is also God's presence.*

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<sup>47</sup> Quoted by Johnston, *Christian Zen*, from *Writings from the "Philokalia on Prayer of the Heart,"* trans. E. Kadlovbovsky and G. E. H. Palmer (London: Faber and Faber, 1951), 80.

<sup>48</sup> Newman, *Disciplines of Attention*, 52; see chaps. 5–6 for Newman's analysis of the *Exercises*. My own analysis draws mainly on Rehg, "Religious Values and Science" (see n. 4 above). For the corresponding texts in the *Exercises*, see *The Spiritual Exercises of Saint Ignatius: A Translation and Commentary*, trans. George E. Ganss (Chicago: Loyola University Press, 1992). I cite Ignatius's text as *SpEx* followed by section number; Ganss's

most striking example of Christian mindfulness in the *Exercises*, and so I focus on these.

In the context of a retreat or discernment of some particular choice, the Rules for Discernment help one to discriminate between the different interior movements one experiences, distinguishing the consolations originating in God from the desolations arising from other sources (whether myself, others, or the evil spirit). The rules also enter in after a choice, when one seeks confirmation by continuing to notice consolations and desolations

associated with the choice.<sup>49</sup> Both the rules for the First Week and those for the Second Week are to a large extent descriptive, telling us what to look for in the various desires, inclinations, and feelings that move one first toward one alternative, then toward another. For example, the second rule for the First Week says that “it is characteristic of the evil spirit to cause gnawing anxiety, to sadden, and to set up obstacles,” whereas “it is characteristic of

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*The Rules for Discernment provide the most striking example of Christian mindfulness in the Exercises.*

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the good spirit to stir up courage and strength, consolations, tears, inspirations, and tranquility” (*SpEx* 315:2, 3). The third and fourth rules go on to clarify consolation and desolation in their specifically spiritual sense.<sup>50</sup> Still further aspects are described in rules 11 through 14. Many of the rules for the Second Week are likewise descriptive, focusing on the subterfuges the evil spirit employs to masquerade as an “angel of light,” and telling us how to discriminate these from actions of the good spirit.

These descriptive rules portray discernment as a practice in mindfulness, for they provide concrete ways of attending to God’s action in us and distinguishing that action from counterfeits. The mindful character of

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appended commentary I cite as Ganss, “Endnotes,” followed by the note number.

<sup>49</sup> For further literature on the Rules for Discernment, see Ganss, “Endnotes,” no. 141. Ignatius articulates his own understanding of the rules in his letter to Sister Teresa Rejadell, June 18, 1536, in *Letters of St. Ignatius of Loyola*, trans. William J. Young, S.J. (Chicago: Loyola University Press, 1959), 18–24. I have also benefited from the “Official Directory of 1599,” *On Giving the Exercises: The Early Jesuit Manuscript Directories and Official Directory of 1599*, trans. Martin E. Palmer, S.J. (St. Louis: Institute of Jesuit Sources, 1996), hereafter cited as *Official Directory*, followed by the paragraph number being cited. See also Jules J. Toner, S.J., *Commentary on Saint Ignatius’ Rules for the Discernment of Spirits: Guide to the Principles and Practice* (St. Louis: Institute of Jesuit Sources, 1982).

<sup>50</sup> Toner, *Commentary*, 81 f.



discernment according to the rules is also evident in the *Official Directory* of 1599, according to which discernment primarily involves listening: “Simply listen to the voice of God and dispose [yourself] as best [you] can to hear that voice and receive the movements.”<sup>51</sup> Like the other forms of mindfulness, the rules constitute a practice of disciplined receptivity to God’s action in the present moment, specifically, God’s action in oneself. They also display a relation to affect and practical engagement, similar to the connection we have already noted between Buddhist mindfulness and compassion. As Newman argues, the kind of attentiveness engendered by these rules is not a detached knowing devoid of feeling. Rather, in the context of the Exercises the rules are meant to develop an affectively charged mindfulness—they are meant to change what we want.<sup>52</sup> Many readers no doubt have experienced this themselves: precisely by illuminating the source of various desires and feelings in me, the rules engender the energy and courage to act in sync with God’s spirit.

The idea of Ignatian discernment as a practice of mindfulness has some interesting broader implications for the institutional engagement of the Society of Jesus as a corporate body. In the last section I suggest a general way we might frame this broader conception of corporate mindfulness.

## The Practice of Mindfulness as Institutional Engagement

In this concluding section I suggest a further expansion of the idea of mindfulness. But before I wade into these more speculative thoughts, I should pull things together a bit. Specifically, I want to clarify three things: the basic idea of mindfulness, the relation of mindfulness to evaluation and practical judgment, and the distinctively Christian contribution to mindfulness.

### *Mindfulness: The Basic Idea*

In everyday parlance, mindfulness—talk of “minding” something or “minding” what one does—refers to heeding or paying attention to something in the present. Mindfulness is being aware of the present moment and its reality, what is happening in oneself and one’s surroundings. If the idea of mindfulness is not to slide off into a mere vacuity, we must keep this core notion in mind. (Another interesting formulation: we must be mindful of how we think of mindfulness!) Thus, being mindful is not the same as imagining, remembering, or anticipating. My earlier reference to some forms of Christian prayer as exercises in “retrospective mindfulness” is thus a bit of

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<sup>51</sup> *Official Directory*, 221.

<sup>52</sup> Newman, *Disciplines of Attention*, 53.

a stretch, and it may be somewhat misleading. There the idea was to relate a form of prayer to the engaged practice of mindfulness of what one is doing; strictly speaking, recollection of the past is not the same as mindfulness regarded as attentiveness to the present.

However, one can be mindful that one is imagining, remembering, or anticipating: I can be aware that I'm engaging in some imaginative fantasy, dwelling on some past event, fretting over an upcoming deadline, and so on. Being mindful of such thoughts and distractions places me in the present moment, and thus differs from those states in which I am fully absorbed in some fantasy, memory, or worry. As Newman puts it, in being mindful one pays attention to the various things pulling at one's immediate attention.<sup>53</sup> We have already seen that Buddhist insight meditation aims at a heightened awareness of some present object of attention, such as one's breathing—

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*Mindfulness is being aware of the present moment and its reality, what is happening in oneself and one's surroundings.*

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albeit not to the forced exclusion of other things that may arise and momentarily capture one's immediate attention. Such meditative practices should carry over into one's daily living, engendering an ongoing awareness of what one is about, an awareness that is engaged with the direct objects of activity, on the one hand, while simultaneously monitoring that engagement on the other.

### *Mindfulness and Judgment*

Buddhist commentators never tire of stressing the nonjudgmental or nonevaluative character of mindful attention to the present. However, we should interpret such disclaimers in relation to other statements about nondetachment and the compassionate character of mindfulness. In urging us to set aside judgments and evaluations, Buddhists want us to be as open as possible to reality as it appears before us, unfiltered by our various fears, prejudices, pre-given conceptual frames, and other cultural screening devices. Such structures are necessary to help us cope with the chaotic complexity of the world about us. But they also represent potential attachments, limited badges of self-identity that block awareness of reality and prevent us from responding in appropriate ways to what lies before us. For a concrete literary illustration of this core Buddhist insight, one can hardly do better than George Eliot's *Middlemarch*, whose plot is driven in large measure by

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<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*, 43.

the way in which the characters' limited perspectives, fears, and vanities lead them—in some cases, tragically—to misperceive one another. Eliot's remark on the self captures this point, and thus provides an appropriate epigraph with which to open an essay on mindfulness.

At one level, then, injunctions against evaluation are meant to keep us maximally open to reality and thus ready to respond most appropriately. Such a response presupposes a confidence, I think, in something like a natural human tendency toward goodness and compassion, evoked simply by the unfiltered encounter with reality and leading us to respond more appropriately than we would if we followed preordained cultural scripts. Thus, at a deeper level, the Buddhist wariness of evaluation need not imply an amoral, purely contemplative stance toward the world. Rather, it highlights the priority of situated perception over abstract principles for moral engagement.<sup>54</sup> This preference for perception accords with a general trend among moral philosophers in recent decades. Virtue theorists, feminist philosophers and proponents of the ethics of care, moral "particularists," and the like have argued that virtuous character, empathy, and perceptive attunement to the concrete situation are better guides to morally appropriate action than are abstract principles and rules.<sup>55</sup> In short, mindfulness involves a non-egocentric, loving attention to the present. Such awareness should heighten one's capacity to judge and act in a morally sensitive manner.

### *Mindful Christian Engagement*

For Christians, this loving attention to the present is imbued with faith in a personal God drawing all creation toward the glory of the Parousia. This faith perspective explains distinctively Christian prayer forms and sacred words in connection with practices of mindfulness. At the level of daily moral engagement, however, I'm not sure that mindful Christian engagement differs all that much from Buddhist mindfulness—though in extraordinary circumstances some differences might emerge (for example, Buddhists but not Christians practice self-immolation as a form of nonaggres-

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<sup>54</sup> In fact, this point is explicit in Gunaratana, *Mindfulness*, 25–28, which distinguishes three "levels of morality." At the highest level, moral judgment depends, not on strictly following the rules, but on the "ability to juggle all the factors in every situation to arrive at a unique, creative, and appropriate response each time," taking account of others' needs and one's own (*ibid.*, 26).

<sup>55</sup> See, for example, Martha Nussbaum, *Love's Knowledge* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990); Lawrence A. Blum, *Moral Perception and Particularity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994); Eva Feder Kittay and Diana T. Meyers, eds., *Women and Moral Theory* (Savage, Md.: Rowman and Littlefield, 1987); Brad Hooker and Margaret Little, eds., *Moral Particularism* (Oxford: Clarendon, 2000).

sive political protest). Ignatian discernment, on the other hand, does involve a significant difference, namely a *discriminating* attention to desires and other interior movements. This distinctively Ignatian form of mindfulness emphasizes explicit evaluation and judgment, an emphasis that sharply contrasts with the disclaimers we find in the Buddhist approach.

This surface contrast may stem from the different contexts in which the two traditions developed. Many of the Buddhist texts I've consulted, as well as many of the Christian appropriations of Buddhist prayer methods, strike me as primarily oriented toward heightened contemplative awareness, growth in prayer (though here some of Thich Nhat Hanh's books are an exception). Indeed, many of these texts appear to have been written by monks. In a monastic context, one can afford simply to notice various interior states and movements without evaluating them, especially when the end in view is an insight into the transitory character of mundane reality. As already noted, this attitude is not opposed to engaged action; indeed, it fosters appropriately compassionate engagement. But Ignatius's Spiritual Exercises, because they aim not simply at prayer but at fostering *practical* Christian commitment, distinctively place in the foreground the orientation toward action.

Thus, in contrast to many of the texts on Buddhist mindfulness meditation, Ignatian discernment—in particular the Rules for the Discernment of Spirits—links mindfulness with explicit evaluation and judgment. That is, one pays attention to interior states and movements precisely in order to evaluate them in relation to possible choices and practical commitments. Like his Buddhist brothers and sisters, Ignatius insists that right choices and actions flow from a freedom from attachments or, as he puts it, “indifference.” And like the Buddhists, Ignatius provides us with a set of “spiritual exercises” for arriving at such indifference. In contrast to many Buddhists, however, Ignatius also provides us with a method or set of instructions for making explicit judgments about which choices are appropriate, that is, in sync with God's action in the world.

This observation leads me to the somewhat more speculative extension of mindfulness that I promised above. As Jesuits, we want both our personal choices and our institutional commitments to flow from such discernment of spirits. The latter concern suggests a way of taking mindfulness to a new level, which has to do with our collective mindfulness as a corporate body. At least two broad questions arise at this corporate level. One can ask, first, how we as a Society are mindfully engaged. Second, one can ask how our institutions foster mindfulness in the people they serve. In my closing reflections I take up each question in turn.

## Corporate Mindfulness in the Society

Given the link between mindfulness and discernment, the most obvious starting point for addressing the first question is the idea of communal discernment, the importance of which generals (and other superiors) have emphasized in recent decades.<sup>56</sup> To get a handle on the kind of mindfulness this involves, recall first that as an exercise in mindfulness, discernment in general has two sides. In discerning a personal or corporate choice, that is, one pays attention to interior movements precisely in their relation to choices—ways of practically engaging in the world. Hence, the other side of the attention to our own interior movements is an attention to the world to which those choices respond: in mindful discernment we strive to read the “signs of the times.” To borrow Ignacio Ellacuria’s term, we want our choices to issue from mindful attentiveness to the present “historical reality”; that is, the situation and possibilities we have inherited from the past, whose apt realization depends on our choices.<sup>57</sup> Consequently, the question regarding the corporate mindfulness of the Society leads on the one hand to self-reflection, that is, reflection on the interior movements within the Society as a corporate body and on our own corporate freedom from attachments and preconceptions. On the other hand, it leads to an extroverted attention to the world in which we are called to follow Christ. Although mindfulness is focused on the present, Ellacuria’s analysis implies that this focus must be informed by an appreciation of how the historical character of the situation—including the Society, its traditions and institutions—shapes the possibilities for appropriate action. (This connection raises further questions regarding the relation between mindfulness and historical awareness, but I cannot delve into the matter here.)

Traditionally, the task of corporate self-reflection fell chiefly on the shoulders of superiors and generals, and to carry it out they were to depend

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*In contrast to many of the texts on Buddhist mindfulness meditation, Ignatian discernment—in particular the Rules for the Discernment of Spirits—links mindfulness with explicit evaluation and judgment.*

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<sup>56</sup> See Peter-Hans Kolvenbach, S.J., “On Apostolic Discernment in Common,” Letter to the Society of Jesus, November 5, 1986, *Acta Romana Societatis Iesu* 19 (1987): 720–40 (with appendix).

<sup>57</sup> See Kevin F. Burke, S.J., *The Ground beneath the Cross: The Theology of Ignacio Ellacuria* (Washington, D.C.: Georgetown University Press, 2000), chaps. 3–4.



on the manifestations of the Jesuits under their authority. We can see both the interior and exterior dimensions of mindfulness in this practice. Provincials often speak of this practice as a particularly consoling one: the manifestations give the superior a profound sense of the interior consolations enlivening the corporate body. Manifestation also provides an important avenue—though certainly not the only avenue—leading out on the world, insofar as members bring their perceptions of regional apostolic needs to superiors. In other words, by giving the superior a better sense of the interior movements of grace and resistance in the members, and by alerting him to local and regional needs, the practice of manifestation helps superiors make mindful corporate decisions.

The provincial and general congregations provide the most obvious example of communal discernment in the traditional model of mindful governance. But we can also view some of our recent practices as aiming at more broadly distributed exercises of corporate mindfulness; for example, the annual or occasional province get-togethers in which members reflect on their apostolates, province commitments, and so on. Might we not see these events as efforts to become mindful, as a body, of the needs of the region and of what different Jesuits are doing in response to those needs?

Some recent work in social psychology is quite suggestive in this context. In their study of aircraft-carrier-flight-deck teams, Karl E. Weick and Karlene H. Roberts argued that safety could be enhanced by the collective mindfulness of the flight-deck team and pilot. Here collective mindfulness refers to the way in which team members each carried out procedures in the concomitant awareness of the demands of the situation on other members. In a mindful group, that is, each member is not narrowly focused on performing his or her own task, but is also attuned to the situation as it confronts the other team members. Mindfulness thus allows the team as a whole to respond more appropriately to novel situations, for example, when several things go wrong at once.<sup>58</sup>

Although our aims as Jesuits go beyond the narrow task orientation that characterizes a flight-deck crew, the idea of being collectively attuned to one another strikes me as applicable to the Society, particularly in regard to the “union of minds and hearts” that Ignatius considered so crucial. There are various ways one might develop such applications. For example, the idea of collective mindfulness suggests that our attunement as Jesuits to the apostolic challenges and opportunities of the present reality will be enhanced by our mutual attunement to one another’s apostolic endeavors. This

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<sup>58</sup> Weick and Roberts, “Collective Mind.” These authors draw on Gilbert Ryle’s conception of heedfulness (see nn. 5 and 6 above).

suggests, more specifically, that the concrete choices a Jesuit makes in his own apostolate—for example, what someone in higher education teaches and writes about—would be influenced by what other Jesuits are experiencing in their apostolates.

The foregoing remarks suggest that, in general, the corporate mindfulness of the Society—its collective mindfulness as a group—depends on a kind of *intersubjective* mindfulness that only arises between individuals, such that the mindfulness of one person depends on the mindfulness of the other. For example, when a superior makes a decision regarding the corporate engagement of the Society, the mindfulness of that decision at least partly depends on the mindfulness of the various Jesuits whom the superior consults, or whose manifestations he receives. This point holds all the more for collective modes of decision making: precisely the reciprocal, intersubjective mindfulness that arises only between the various members of the decision-making body (in face-to-face interactions and faith sharing) allows for collectively mindful corporate decisions. Moreover, if the observations in the previous paragraph are on target, then this general point also holds for modes of mindful corporate engagement other than formal decision-making contexts. That is, the collective mindfulness that emerges informally through conversations, meetings, and the like depends on a kind of intersubjective mindfulness, in which individual Jesuits reciprocally enhance each other's mindfulness.

## Fostering Mindfulness through Higher Education

In discussing the second broad question—how our institutions might foster mindfulness in those we work with and serve—I focus on the apostolate with which I am most familiar, higher education. If we think of mindfulness as attentiveness to the present historical reality, then the idea of fostering mindfulness through higher education comports with those documents, such as those of GC 34 and *Ex corde ecclesiae*, which call for a dialog with culture.<sup>59</sup> Here I want to suggest a possible framework

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*The provincial and general congregations provide the most obvious example of communal discernment in the traditional model of mindful governance.*

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<sup>59</sup> See Pope John Paul II, *Ex corde ecclesiae*, para. 43: “A Catholic university . . . is also a primary and privileged place for a fruitful dialogue between the Gospel and culture” (see also paras. 15–20, 48 f.); *Documents of the Thirty-Fourth General Congregation*

within which we might understand the ways in which our higher educational institutions have the apostolic aim of enhancing mindfulness.

We might begin by thinking of the various disciplines as providing different modes of directed attention, defined by their distinctive topics and methodologies. The divisions I suggest here are neither definitive nor hard and fast; rather, they simply provide some clues for how one could think of this or that disciplinary endeavor apostolically, from the standpoint of mindfulness. For example, we could think of the natural sciences as teaching us to attend more carefully to aspects of the surrounding physical reality, the natural environment, our own bodies, and so on. The social sciences and humanities help us notice aspects of the social world in which we live. Philosophy involves reflection on basic presuppositions and conceptual frameworks—both for the sciences and for our thought and language in general—and thus can be seen as fostering a mindfulness of the interiority of our culture, so to speak. Other humanities, for example, literature, seem to head in that direction as well, albeit in a more concrete and imaginative fashion. History can indirectly enhance our awareness of the present, can help us notice things in the present precisely because we know more about the past. Still other disciplines, such as the fine arts, seem to cross the lines sketched above, drawing our attention to beauty and ugliness in various domains of reality. When approached from within this framework, mathematics teaches us to be attentive to quantitative manipulations and relationships that are relevant for any number of human activities and disciplines. Theology, finally, imbues the entire multidisciplinary matrix with a specifically religious significance by fostering a mindfulness of God's action throughout reality, in all its dimensions—physical, social, cultural, and so on.

Notice that the above framework has that characteristically Christian dual structure that first emerged in the contrast between Buddhist and Christian mindfulness. At one level, that is, the various nontheological disciplines foster mindfulness of the present reality in all its complexity. For the Christian, however, this mundane reality harbors the action of a personal God who both creates and redeems. Theology makes this faith perspective explicit, and thus brings another level of awareness to bear on the realities to which the other disciplines attend.

But mindfulness involves more than simply acquiring information through study. The student who learns mindfully does not merely accumulate facts and ideas. In light of the reflections above, I think we can see that education fosters mindfulness insofar as one's studies lead to and deepen a



personal transformation. So far I have focused more on practices of mindfulness than on the transformation itself. To get at some deeper features of this transformation, I further elaborate on the kind of insight at which mindfulness meditation aims. I then close by drawing some implications for mindful Catholic education.

As Buddhists emphasize, insight meditation leads one to experience the impermanence, unsatisfactoriness, and interdependence (or “selflessness”) of all reality. We can easily see how certain disciplines, such as history and political science, can make us more aware of how impermanent and unsatisfactory reality is; but the relevant transformation involves more than such an intellectual awareness. As the idea of interdependence suggests, the core transformation leads one to perceive how deeply one’s very existence and identity are conditioned by and interconnected with everything else: the vast natural cosmos, the planet’s biosphere and ecosystem, historical and cultural assumptions, linguistic forms, one’s particular society and peers, and so on. As a *personal* transformation, such an insight overturns our intuitive assumptions about autonomy as a kind of self-possession. Rather, one realizes how *little* of who one takes oneself “to be” lies within one’s independent control.

This transformation in how one views oneself engenders a shift in how one views other people; specifically, one should become more aware of how much others are likewise existentially conditioned and interdependent. This realization opens one up to a more compassionate understanding of others, so that one can respond in an appropriately loving manner to people whose actions appear unreasonable or antagonistic. At the same time, one is also attentive to how one’s own place and background are shaping one’s responses to the other and possibly contributing to negative reactions. Compassion involves both a deeper understanding of the other as well as a deeper understanding of how one’s perceptions of the other depend on one’s own conditioning.

But the idea of “selflessness” suggests an even more radical transformation: that one can perhaps even begin to see the other person *as oneself* or, what is the same thing, to see *oneself as the other*. Not that one assimilates others to oneself by denying their differences. In fact, it’s just the opposite: one acknowledges that those very differences are also one’s own, at a deep level. Nor is this just a science-fiction fantasy, an imaginative exercise. In a literal sense, others’ differences genuinely belong to me as well. The “differences” I primarily have in mind here are those personal characteristics and behavior patterns we find repulsive or off-putting in others. Thus, the other person’s ugliness, incompetence, sinfulness, silly ideas, unreasonableness, abhorrent inclinations, and so on are at a deep level *my* qualities as well, insofar as “I” could easily become like that other person under similar



circumstances. Conversely, I could easily lose the good qualities I now consider “my own.” This is not to say that under different circumstances I necessarily would have become like this other person. The point is that nothing in my core self can guarantee that I wouldn’t have become like him or her—just as abhorrent, mean, incompetent, and so on. In other words, the unsatisfactoriness of others is not just *their* unsatisfactoriness. We all share in it.

From a Christian standpoint, the transformation I have just described—growth into a deep awareness of one’s interconnection with everything else, including the most repulsive—involves the sense of one’s immersion in the ongoing process of creation and redemption. In more traditional terms, mindfulness involves an ongoing conversion to humility based on a deepening insight into one’s “creaturehood” and “need for redemption.” But all this is rather abstract. What specific contribution can Catholic higher education (or Catholic education in general) make toward such a transformation?

One real possibility, it seems to me, concerns the kind of conscience formation that goes with education-based mindfulness. Specifically, mindful education aims to help students develop a compassionate conscience informed by a humble awareness of their place in, and interconnection with, the world. In the United States that means an awareness of their place as

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*As the idea of interdependence suggests, the core transformation leads one to perceive how deeply one’s very existence and identity are conditioned by and interconnected with everything else.*

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inhabitants of a nation whose political decisions and aggregate behaviors have an enormous impact on other peoples and on the ecosystem. Just as mindfulness meditations enhance one’s attentiveness to inner and outer aspects of one’s bodily positions and movements in the immediate surroundings, so mindful education fosters an expanded attentiveness to one’s feelings, thoughts, and actions in relation to a global environment, both natural and human. Mindful Catholic education, therefore, aims to open up in students a new and much broader horizon of attention that

transforms *how* they examine their conscience. That is, education can (and does) transform students to become mindful of how deeply they are interconnected with the rest of the globe and how implicated, as persons living in the United States, with the problems and challenges of the world—its “unsatisfactoriness.”

As conditioned by the kind of selfless humility described above, educated mindfulness naturally issues in a keener sense of our mutual need

for redemption (a sense not tied simply to personal failings), and it provokes questions about how we can compassionately and appropriately respond through our concrete choices. These are difficult questions, and answering them requires both common sense and discernment. Guilt, I suspect, is one of the main traps. After all, the students are not guilty in the usual sense: they have not created the problems that cry for redemption, nor can they solve those problems. And choices driven by guilt rather than love tend to have a compulsive character, just the opposite of mindful compassion. Another trap is numbness: being so overwhelmed by the sheer quantity of events, in particular, all the suffering in the world, that one reverts to merely processing information. Again the opposite of mindfulness: one reduces the world to “virtual reality,” one more current in the endless stream of digital information that constantly inundates us today.<sup>60</sup> Compulsive action, indifference—both are forms of “social desolation” that undermine the capacity for mindful engagement.<sup>61</sup>

To be complete, then, educating for mindfulness calls for methods of conscience formation by which students can avoid such traps: students need ways of “examining one’s conscience” that are based on discernment rather than guilt, a capacity for silence rather than a craving for digital stimulation. The particular methods can range from simple daily practices of prayer and reflection to extended retreats; but they all involve practices of discernment, carried out in silence, which bring the necessary element of disciplined concentration into mindful education. By linking knowledge of the world with discerning silence, mindful education as a mode of conscience formation combines awareness and concentration in its own way (analogous to *vipassana* meditation). How does this combination counter the two traps? A mindful examination of conscience counters numbness by taking what one has learned about the world and its troubles into an area of

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*Education can (and does) transform students to become mindful of how deeply they are interconnected with the rest of the globe and how implicated, as persons living in the United States, with the problems and challenges of the world.*

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<sup>60</sup> See de Zengotita, “Numbing of the American Mind” (n. 10 above).

<sup>61</sup> On the idea of social desolation, see William A. Barry, S.J., “The Spiritual Exercises and Social Action: The Role of the Director,” in *Soundings: A Task Force on Social Consciousness and Ignatian Spirituality* (Washington, D.C.: Center for Concern, 1974), 22–24.

disciplined silence in which one's own feelings and interior movements can once more emerge. And in this silence one counters guilt by attending to these movements, so as to discern how the Spirit is acting in one's heart, moving one to specific practical engagements that flow freely rather than compulsively. Given the dangers of self-deception, feedback from trustworthy interlocutors (for example, a spiritual director, a faith-sharing community) plays a crucial role in educating students for mindfulness.

In the context of mindful education, discernment must answer at least two interdependent questions: (1) On what in particular will I focus my attention; that is, for the most part, what should I read and listen to, with whom should I converse, and so on? and (2) how can I appropriately respond in my concrete choices?<sup>62</sup> Although an examination of conscience might well uncover problematic behaviors and omissions, I'm not sure that these would usually be sins in the traditional sense. Nonetheless, discernment can lead one to consider behavioral changes (for example, concrete ways of simplifying one's lifestyle or of being more generous) or even a change in career path or vocation.

The foregoing remarks remain sketchy, but I trust that Jesuits working in the educational apostolate are not unfamiliar with actual cases of personal transformation that result from mindful conscience formation. In describing our educational efforts and influence in terms of mindfulness, I aimed to shed new light on what we are already doing, in the hope that further possibilities might thereby open up. Certainly much more could be said about how to make mindful learning a concrete possibility. The documents of the Thirty-Fourth General Congregation supply us with important further ideas. But these remain somewhat abstract in relation to the demands posed by our local apostolates. Indeed, no document or essay can tell us how to realize mindfulness for our times. For that we must engage in the kinds of mindful corporate endeavors outlined above.

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<sup>62</sup> There is more to be said here about the "composition of place" we provide for our students in education; for example, through service projects, campus events, and so on. Concerning the importance of place in one's response to historical reality, see Burke, *Ground*, 103-6.

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